

For Angelika,
**who for forty years now has followed my sociological and philosophical
exploits with apposite distance and wholesome forbearance.**

Wer erkennen will, muss denken *und* schauen.

Heinrich Rickert

**Den Menschen, der erkannt wird, machen Natur
und Geschichte: aber der Mensch der erkennt,
macht Natur und Geschichte.**

Georg Simmel

Preface

Heinrich John Rickert (1863-1936) has haunted me for a couple of decades. There are several individuals - students, friends and a few sociological colleagues - who had to endure my expositions about his ideas and writings. They helped me, often unknowingly, to clarify my own thoughts of and about the Rickertiana that got piled up in my mind. I cannot begin to mention them by name, but feel obliged to thank them anonymously for functioning as a formal audience in the lecture hall of the university and as an informal audience outside of it.

René Focué, professor of philosophy at the Catholic University of Louvain and the Erasmus University of Rotterdam is my esteemed colleague and friend with whom I am professionally connected for many years now. I am grateful for his willingness to function as my philosophical guide and advisor in a later stage of my Rickert-project. His astonishing knowledge of the history of ideas and the various currents of contemporary philosophy, but above all his joy of concept formations and theory constructions – what Rickert once aptly called *Logosfreudigkeit* – were a great source of inspiration. Naturally, I am responsible for all the flaws and mistakes in this book, but in general it would not have become the book that it is now without his assistance and collegial advice.

Herman Philipse was my advisor in an early stage of the project. I profited from his phenomenal expertise in the field of analytic philosophy, his unrelenting critical mind, mellowed by a great sense of witty humor. He remained alien to the world of neo-Kantianism and in particular to the somewhat surrealistic philosophy of Rickert, but we developed a mutual friendship which I shall always cherish.

In the last stage of the project I have benefited from very valuable, critical comments by Koo van der Wal, professor emeritus of the Erasmus University and Maurice Weyembergh, professor emeritus of the Free University of Brussels. Their impressive knowledge of the history of philosophy averted some serious errors of interpretation. Needless to add that I remain responsible for the faults that still remain in the present expositions.

Anton Bevers who in the early 1980's wrote a PhD-thesis on Georg Simmel under my supervision, and is presently professor of sociology at Erasmus University, is the only sociologist I know who actually has read Rickert, in particular his ideas about the logic of Cultural and Natural Science. His intellectual support and his friendship have been crucial for the completion of my Rickert project.

This book was written in what I felt and still feel as the fool's liberty of academic retirement. No longer plagued by my post-Calvinist 'ethic of responsibility' towards the university as a bureaucratic organization, I have the opportunity now to read and write whenever I feel like doing so. I fully experience the luxury of what Karl Mannheim has called the *freischwebende Intelligenz*. However, I must express my gratitude to the Erasmus University for offering me all of its facilities in a so-called 'hospitality contract' upon my retirement in December 2002.

My special acknowledgement goes out to the secretaries of the Department of Sociology, Marianne Otto and Betty Thiels, and their successors Jolien Veensma and Shaheen Khan. They were always prepared to print the various drafts of the manuscript, and to assist me in bureaucratic matters. In the final stage of the project Tineke van de Pas, secretary of the Law Department, has been equally helpful. Ilja Fase, graduate student of sociology, was of an invaluable help in ordering and collecting books and articles at the library of the university. I am grateful for her precision and dedication which have been essential since my 'empirical data' had to be collected in the library.

A few preliminary comments may be helpful to the reader. The text is interspersed with short excursions which are printed in small letters. Many of them are references to other philosophers and philosophical currents. They can be skipped by the professional philosopher who obviously is (or should be) acquainted with the history of philosophical ideas. Even great thinkers are, of course, parts of larger networks made up of fellow thinkers and their thoughts, ideas and theories. It was a laborious task to reconstruct Rickert's philosophical network, since he had the habit of not burdening his expositions with quotes and references. I am aware that my reconstruction is incomplete, but then the desire to be complete can be pedantic and quite burdensome for the reader.

I am not in favor of the system by which references in the text and in the footnotes refer again to items in the bibliography at the end of the book. I prefer to present such references with their complete annotation as to publisher, place and date of publication in the footnotes.

Finally, I wrote the book in English for two reasons. First of all, neo-Kantian philosophy in general and Rickert's publications in particular are, apart from a few exceptions, not accessible to the Anglo-Saxon world. English, after all, is in this day and age of globalization the *lingua franca*, not just in the worlds of business and politics, but in the intellectual world as well. It is my hope that the present exposition and discussion may lead to translations of Rickert's extensive *oeuvre*. His little book on cultural and natural science, for instance, and his brilliant exposition and witty criticism of vitalism are perfectly suitable for translations into English, particularly since they are still (or again) very timely.

The second reason is yet more relevant. Translating Rickert's often quite fanciful and sometimes even literary German into English helped me to clarify for myself and hopefully also for the reader his complex ideas, concepts and theories. It is my conviction that one should be able to translate German concepts and sentences into English, lest they are closed to a clear understanding of their meaning and significance.

Even in the exceptional case of English translations, such as a few essays from Weber's *Wissenschaftslehre* and a partial translation of Rickert's *opus magnum* on the demarcation of Natural Science and Cultural Science, I decided to translate all German quotations myself. But I added the original German texts in the footnotes in order to enable the reader who possesses a passive and/or active knowledge of the German language to control my translations.¹

For biographical and bibliographical data I refer to the handsome volume of essays by Rickert edited by Rainer A. Bast.²

¹ The translations and references of the two motto's of this book are the following: (A) 'Who wants to acquire knowledge, should think *and* perceive.' Heinrich Rickert, *Das Eine, die Einheit und die Eins*, ('The One [as opposed to the Other], the Unity, and the First [as in number 1]'), (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1924), p. 87. (B) 'Man who is being known, is made by nature and history: but man who knows, makes nature and history.' Georg Simmel, *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie*, ('The Problems of the Philosophy of History'), 1892, (München, Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1923), p. VII.

² Heinrich Rickert, *Philosophische Aufsätze*, ('Philosophical papers'), (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1999), pp. 437-457. See also the Internet: in November 2004 Google offered 23.300 and Yahoo 70.400 hits under 'Heinrich Rickert'.